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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the individual's purpose in life, existential anxiety, powerlessness and use of alcohol/drugs and the tendency to be sexually promiscuous. The study is rooted in the work of Viktor E. Frankl, which suggested that a lack of meaning and purpose can cause socially deviant behavior and psychological problems. College students (N=344) participated in the study, filling out a variety of research instruments. Results indicate a significant relationship between lack of meaning in life and social deviance. Powerlessness and existential anxiety, when examined separately, did not seem to predict alcohol and drug use, but the linear combinations of low purpose in life, high existential anxiety, and high powerlessness proved a significant predictor of alcohol and drug use. Males tended to use more alcohol and drugs, to be more sexually promiscuous, and to feel more existential anxiety and powerlessness than females. Drug involvement was significantly greater for students with low GPAs than for students with high GPAs. The former also showed lower purpose in life, higher existential anxiety, and tended to be more sexually promiscuous. Students having no religion show significantly lower purpose in life scores than did religious students. (RJM)

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PREDICTORS OF DRUG/ALCOHOL ABUSE AND SEXUAL PROMISCUITY
OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between the individual's purpose in life, existential anxiety, and powerlessness and use of alcohol/drugs and the tendency to be sexually promiscuous. The study is rooted in the work of Viktor E. Frankl which suggests that a lack of meaning and purpose can cause socially deviant behavior and psychological problems. The scales used in this study include the Purpose in Life (PIL) test, the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS), the Powerlessness Scale (PS), and the Nam Behavior Assessment Questionnaire (NBAQ). Three hundred and forty-four undergraduate college students served as subjects for this investigation. It was hypothesized that the linear combination of the major scales used would correlate positively with reported sexual promiscuity and substance abuse. Multivariate multiple regression and univariate multiple regression confirmed the hypotheses. Results were reported and discussed in terms of some therapeutic approaches, demographic variables, and future research.

Predictors of Drug/Alcohol Abuse and Sexual Promiscuity
of College Students

This research investigated the connection of existential philosophy applied to existential psychology as outlined by Frankl's work on meaningfulness in life. He claims that a sense of meaning or purpose in life contributes to good physical health and psychological adjustment. Frankl argues that individuals in modern industrial society are in a constant competition for survival that robs them of the time needed to engage in the discovery of meaningful relationships.

Researchers content that possible reasons for a trend toward sexual promiscuity (Reiss, 1990); alcohol; and/or drug abuse among young adults (Stein, Bentler, & Newcomb, 1988; Windle & Miller-Tutzauer, 1991) in modern society is that environment feedback creates a sense of dissonance between the child's cultural myth and experience which results in a lack of a sense of meaning in life.

Frankl's concept of meaning in life held central importance for traditional existential psychology and currently exerts its influence on mainstream psychology by insisting that meaning in life is necessary to good mental health (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992).

Frankl (1969) argues that an existential vacuum

(the results of man's frustration when his will to meaning is dispersed, filled with emptiness, despair, alienation, boredom, and loss of purpose) is a common symptom of our time (cited in Good & Good, 1974).

Research indicates that the existential vacuum leads to existential anxiety which in turn leads to increase depression, alcohol use, withdrawal, illness, and psychological problems (Sappington, Bryant, & Oden, 1990). Olive (1990) says that drugs deliver an artificial meaning to life as opposed to authentic meaning. Drug use, sexual promiscuity, and alcohol abuse become ways of living unauthentic lives in an effort to deal with the pain and meaninglessness persons experience in their lives. A feeling of powerlessness is probably related to existential anxiety and meaninglessness (Coll, 1986; Travis, 1986).

This study attempted to discover if any relationship exists between individuals' meaning or purpose in life, their level of existential anxiety, their sense of powerlessness, and their level of involvement with alcohol, drugs, and sexual promiscuity. Several research studies have found significant relationships between individuals' drug/alcohol abuse and the lack of meaning and purpose in life and/or powerlessness (Coleman, Kaplan, & Downing, 1986; Frankl, 1978; Labouvie, 1986; Padelford,

1992; Shean & Fechtmann, 1971).

While other studies look at the relationship (Seeman and Seeman, 1992); and powerlessness and level of control in interpersonal relationships (Mookherjee, 1986); and phencyclidine (PCP) use and feelings of helplessness (Young, Lawson, & Gacono, 1987); and the relationship between responsibility, self-transcendence, and time perception to powerlessness (Ho, 1987); and the relationship between married couple alienation and powerlessness/ meaninglessness (Neal, Ivoska, & Groat, 1976): No empirical study has been reported in recent literature that tries to assess the relationship between existential problems (existential anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, sense of meaninglessness, and existential vacuum) and sexual promiscuity. This study attempted to discover the strength and direction of any relationship between existential problems and sexual promiscuity.

Frankl (1978) argues that the impersonal climate of industrial society contributes to a sense of loneliness for many people caught up in modern society--the loneliness of "the lonely crowd." The intense wish for intimacy emerges to compensate for this lack of warmth/closeness. People cry for intimacy. This cry for intimacy is so urgent that it is often converted into the invitation "please touch." Sexual

promiscuity may be just a small step from this cry for sensual intimacy. Sexual addiction appears as today's new disease premised with symptoms surrounding inner emptiness (existential vacuum). Giovacchini (1986) suggests that some people who experience internal conflict may reduce psychic/internal tensions through the use of drugs and/or alcohol, while others may engage in sexually promiscuous or antisocial behavior. Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression, and addiction are understandable in the light of the existential vacuum (Frankl, 1984).

The rationale for using the interrelationship between purpose in life, powerlessness, and existential anxiety to predict atypical behaviors as outlined in this paper is rooted in the work of Frankl which suggests that a lack of meaning and purpose can cause socially deviant behavior and psychopathology. If indeed Frankl is correct, then we must try to outline those connections to better understand some of the reasons behind substance abuse and other deviant behaviors. We may also uncover deeper aspects of human motivation that will provide a foundation from which educational programs, coupled with experience, will provide individuals with ways of incorporating meaning into their daily lives.

This study assessed aspects of existential

anxiety, lack of purpose in life, and powerlessness that may lead to causal relationships that result in hypotheses include the following:

Hypothesis 1: The linear combination of purpose in life, existential anxiety, and powerlessness will be a significant prediction for the linear combination of alcohol, drug use, and sexual promiscuity.

Hypothesis 2: The linear combination of purpose in life, existential anxiety, and powerlessness will be a significant prediction for alcohol and drug use.

Hypothesis 3: The linear combination of purpose in life, existential anxiety, and powerlessness will be a significant prediction for sexual promiscuity.

Method

Subjects

Three hundred and forty-four undergraduate psychology students at Middle Tennessee State University (155 male and 189 female) formed the study group. Table 1 shows the demographic diversity of the study group.

Instruments

Subjects were given the Purpose in Life (PIL) test, the Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS), the

Table 1

Frequency Distribution for Demographic Variables (Age,
Educational Level, and Marital Status)

Interval	Frequency
Age	
20 years and under	102
21-25 years	202
26-30 years	22
31-35 years	7
Over 35 years	11
Educational level	
Freshman	51
Sophomore	69
Junior	76
Senior	146
Other	2
Marital status	
Single	288
Married	32
Divorced	10
Widowed, widower	1
Living together	13

Powerlessness Scale (PS), and a questionnaire developed for the thesis called the Nam Behavior Assessment Questionnaire (NBAQ).

The Purpose in Life test was devised by Crumbaugh and Maholick in 1964 to assess the degree to which individuals experience a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. The test consists of 20 items, each measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Split-half reliabilities for the test was reported in excess of .90 (Crumbaugh, 1968; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964).

The Existential Anxiety Scale was developed by Good and Good in 1974 and includes 32 items. The measure yielded a reliability estimate (KR-20) of $>.89$ for a sample of 237 undergraduates. Hullett (1992) found that the EAS is a good measure of Frankl's definition of existential anxiety. The Powerlessness Scale was devised by Neal and Seeman (1964). The scale consists of seven forced-choice items and had a reproducibility coefficient of .87.

The Nam Behavior Assessment Questionnaire (NBAQ) was developed for this study to assess the level of alcohol and drug use and to assess the level of sexually promiscuous activities. Sexual promiscuity is defined in this study as people who have enjoyed sex with multiple partners, have varied sexual conduct, have sex with strangers, or are obsessed with sex.

Procedure

Each student filled out the research instruments, following detailed instructions, during class time. Testing was anonymous and voluntary. Test-taking time was 20 to 30 minutes. Demographic information was collected on age, gender, grade point average (GPA), fraternity/sorority membership, marital status, educational level, living arrangements, and religion on the NBAQ and all significant findings were reported.

Results

The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each variable appear in Table 2. The mean scores on alcohol/drug and sexual promiscuity for males were 13.52 (SD $\pm$ 10.47), 4.31 (SD $\pm$ 2.67), and for females were 11.18 (SD $\pm$ 8.77), 2.11 (SD $\pm$ 1.82), respectively. Observations with missing data were eliminated during analysis.

Multivariate multiple regression showed that the linear combination of the Purpose in Life (PIL) test, Existential Anxiety Scale (EAS), and Powerlessness Scale was a significant predictor of the combination of alcohol/drug use (AD) and sexual promiscuity (SP), $F(6, 604) = 12.89$, $p = .0001$, utilizing Wilk's Lambda. Hypothesis 1 was supported by the results. Subsequent univariate multiple regression revealed that the linear combination of PIL, EAS, and PS is a significant

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the PIL, EAS, PS, AD,
and SP

	PIL SP	EAS	PS	AD
Mean	78.762	4.659	2.927	
12.258	3.102			
Standard deviation	10.764	7.114	1.964	
9.625	2.492			
<u>N</u>	336	328	342	
333	342			

prediction of alcohol and drug use, $F(3, 303) = 14.75$, $p = .0001$. The regression line was $AD = 26.70 - .20 (PIL) + .18 (EAS) + .14 (PS)$. Hypothesis 2 was supported by the results. Using univariate multiple regression, the linear combination of PIL, EAS, and PS are significant predictors of sexually promiscuous activities, $F(3, 303) = 19.06$, $p = .0001$. The regression line was $SP = 2.83 - .003 (PIL) + .14 (EAS) - .07 (PS)$. Hypothesis 3 was supported by statistical analysis.

Additional demographic variables were analyzed through multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The test revealed that the background variables of gender, $F(2, 327) = 41.18$, $p = .0001$, GPA, $F(8, 650) = 5.14$, $p = .0001$, and religion, $F(8, 650) = 5.61$, $p = .0001$, showed a significant effect on the linear combination of alcohol and drug use and sexually promiscuous activities. A significant gender effect was found on the AD, $F(1, 328) = 5.35$, $p = .0213$, and on the SP, $F(1, 328) = 78.36$, $p = .0001$. The GPA showed a significant effect on the AD, $F(4, 326) = 9.41$, $p = .0001$, and on the SP, $F(4, 326) = 5.21$, $p = .0004$. Religion showed a significant effect on the AD, $F(4, 326) = 11.21$, $p = .0001$, and on the SP, $F(4, 326) = 2.70$, $p = .0306$.

A series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done to test the effect of gender, GPA, and religion on PIL, EAS, and PS. The results revealed significant effects of gender

on EAS, $F(1, 325) = 4.85$, $p = .0283$, and PS, $F(1, 339) = 5.68$, $p = .0177$, and GPA on the PIL, $F(4, 331) = 4.05$, $p = .0032$, and on the EAS, $F(4, 323) = 6.12$, $p = .0001$, and religion on the PIL, $F(4, 331) = 4.35$, $p = .0019$. The mean and standard deviation for different variables (AD, SP, PIL, EAS, and PS) are shown in Table 3.

The Pearson correlation coefficient among PIL, EAS, and PS shows that a significant negative relationship was found between PIL and EAS ($r = -.735$, $p = .0001$) and between PIL and PS ($r = -.420$, $p = .0001$). A positive significant relationship between EAS and PS was found, $r = .41$, $p = .0001$.

Discussion

The combined results from this study indicate there is a significant relationship between lack of meaning in life and social deviance. The repercussions of this study provide a focus on the important implications that help us understand the foundations of healthy social relationships.

Previous research (Newcomb et al., 1987; Padelford, 1978; Shean & Feichtmann, 1971) indicates that a low purpose in life is related to alcohol consumption and drug use. This study supports previous research where low purpose in life was significantly related to use of alcohol and/or drugs. One reason for this relationship between low purpose in life and substance use may be a lack of purpose in one's life with an accompanying existential sense of boredom and

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Different Variables (AD, SP, PIL, EAS, and PS)

Interval	AD		SP		PIL		EAS		PS	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Gender										
Male	13.52*	10.47	4.31**	2.67	77.83	11.48	5.61*	8.27	3.20*	2.13
Female	11.18	8.77	2.11	1.82	79.47	10.14	3.88	5.94	2.69	1.78
GPA										
3.50+	8.20	5.95	2.38	2.34	79.71	11.04	5.17	11.27	3.07	1.81
3.00-3.49	10.73	8.67	2.70	2.17	80.25	8.54	3.35	5.22	2.55	1.81
2.50-2.99	12.72	8.66	3.35	2.56	79.34	11.16	4.46	6.92	2.89	1.84
2.00-2.49	13.13	9.65	3.14	2.40	76.42	10.62	5.51	6.07	3.37	2.30
-2.00	29.50**	22.02	6.25**	3.81	65.00**	21.27	17.17**	11.44	3.75	2.38

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Means and Standard Deviations for Different Variables (AD, SP, PIL, EAS, and PS)

Interval	AD		SP		PIL		EAS		PS	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Religion										
Very	6.94	10.25	1.85	2.52	82.78	10.11	4.83	6.90	2.95	2.11
Normal	10.32	7.57	2.90	2.70	79.76	10.89	4.06	7.85	2.87	1.99
Somewhat	13.63	9.68	3.37	2.15	78.69	9.26	4.49	5.57	2.92	1.87
Less	12.64	7.60	3.24	2.15	77.84	9.54	5.41	6.64	2.71	2.04
None	21.87**	15.55	4.09*	2.64	70.59**	15.28	8.05	8.78	3.70	1.96

Note. AD = alcohol/drug use; SP = sexual promiscuity; PIL = Purpose in Life test; EAS = Existential Anxiety Scale; PS = Powerlessness Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

emptiness which moderates the essential mediating link between feelings of meaninglessness and alcohol and drug use. The major attraction to drug use may simply be the ease of access, use, and instant gratification provided (Labouvie, 1986).

In past research, Seeman and Seeman (1992) found that the sense of powerlessness is the most consistent predictor of drinking problems. This study indicates that perhaps powerlessness is not a significant predictor alone for alcohol and drug use. The linear combinations of low purpose in life, high existential anxiety, and high powerlessness are significant predictors of alcohol and drug use. We might speculate that this difference may be related to the different subjects in the two studies. Seeman and Seeman's subjects were work-persons with low to moderate income households. The subjects in this study were mostly middle-class college students. Existential anxiety alone is not a significant predictor for alcohol and drug use. Existential anxiety is most strongly related to sexual promiscuity.

The analysis shows that males tend to use more alcohol and drugs, to be more sexually promiscuous, and to feel more existential anxiety and powerlessness than females in general. Drug involvement is significantly greater for students with low GPA than for students with high GPA. Also students with low GPA show lower purpose in life and higher

existential anxiety and tend to be more sexually promiscuous. In reporting the extent of drug involvement, students having no religion show significantly lower purpose in life scores than do religious students. Students having no religion tend to be involved more in sexually promiscuous activities.

Frankl (1969) thought that philosophical/existential problems which beset us might be increased through the participation in relatively commitment-free sexual activity. The results of this study seem to support his position. Existential anxiety may be rooted in spiritual problems and moral conflict which may be deeply rooted in current social problems. Thus sexual overcompensation may be the result of experiencing existential anxiety.

The results of this study give credibility to Frankl's logotherapy, which is meaning-centered and focuses on the individual's purpose in life, as an appropriate psychotherapeutic treatment. Sappington et al. (1990) found that Frankl's approach, "giving to the world" and "taking from the world," which is one of logotherapeutic techniques, is indeed effective in increasing Purpose in Life scores. They suggest that Frankl's theory is a more useful tool as a scientific theory than has generally been known. This researcher agrees with Frankl's (1969) suggestion that education must equip people with the means to find meaning in life, as well as psychiatry. Future studies could

explore the relationship between existential anxiety, powerlessness, and lack of purpose in life and various social problems, such as unemployment, economic crisis, pollution/loss of rain forests, war/global conflict, starvation, AIDS, loss of ozone, and global warming.

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